

[Jones I. Freeze]

Cabarrus Mill

Concord, N. C.

September 26, 1938

M. L. W.

JONES I. FREEZE

In 1886 Concord was a village with a red mud main street, a few stores clustered about a square, and one cotton mill, the McDonald. However, at that time young J. W. Cannon, a partner in Cannon-Fetzer Drygoods store, was building another cotton mill. Among the workmen on this job, as bricklayer and carpenter, was a stolid "Dutch" farmer from the Gold Hill section of Cabarrus County. His name was Freeze.

Today two of this man's sons have been with Cannon Mills longer than any other employees. I talked with Jonie, the younger son, who has worked in the mill for forty-nine years. At fifty-nine he is wiry, healthy, young looking. He owns his own home, a comfortable two-story bungalow on Corbin Street. The house is spacious and furnished in better taste than many so-called middle class houses in town.

"I don't know what good hit'll do you to talk to me," Jonie said modestly, "for I ain't done nothing much." But he was really pleased that he had been sought out and once he started talking he forgot his shyness.

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"When Mr. J. W. got ready to open up his mill back in '86, he didn't have but thirteen houses for his hands. That don't sound like many nowadays when many a house jest has

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one hand in it, but Mr. J. W. figured if he hired big families, he could get enough hands in them thirteen houses to work his mill.

"I reckon that's howcome he wanted us. Anyway he wrote my father a letter asking him to move his force to the mill — hit was ready to start work. My sister had that letter, but when she was a-cleaning up sometime back, she burnt it up. I sure hated that; I'd a-give most anything for that letter.

"I won't never forgit that day in the fall of '86 when we moved in to Concord. We started out before daylight and hit was way after dark when we got here. Hit don't look like it / could take that long to come sixteen miles, but back then there jest wasn't anything you'd call a road; why two teams always went together so if one got stuck the other could pull it out. I was six year old whenever we moved and what I mainly remember about that trip is hanging my head over the side of the wagon so that I got my chin bumped underneath when we hit the pine log road.

"Soon as the mill opened my father and all the younguns that was old enough commenced to work. There 3 was nine of us younguns, five girls and four boys and everyone of as 'ceptin one got their start in that same mill — hit's the one they call plant number one now. I was too little to go to work right away, but whenever I was nine or / ten I began. At first I doffed. I got ten cents a day for working from six o'clock in the morning to five minutes until seven o'clock in the evening. Course you keep a-goin' up, so I went to the spinning room and on to the weaving room. Then they put me to fixing looms. I've always been a good hand to fix any kind of machinery and after while they made me the overseer of the shop. Well, I stayed at that till fifteen year ago when they give me the job I've got now — the overseer of the yard. And believe me hit is a job too! I have to weigh ever bit of cotton goin' in and out and see to the loadin' and unloadin' of it. Why jest today we handled close to 500 bales —that's somethin'. Let me tell you, and the worst part of it is bossing the Niggers that handle it. You have to talk to 'em like you're a-goin' to kill 'em or they'll lay down on

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you and not do a lick of work. I've got so I can talk jest as mean and hateful as anything — oh I don't mean it, but I have to git the work out of 'em.

"Since the cut I'm not a-makin' but 56¢ a hour.

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That sounds like a lot more than what I started out at, but money don't go nowheres anymore. Back when I was a-gettin' ten and twenty-five cent a day you could take your money to the store and have something to show fer it. Why my father, before he died, had a pile of gold pieces he had saved from way back yonder when we used to git paid off in gold money. A body could save then, but it takes everything you make now to live.

"Education? Don't ask me about that 'cause I never did have none to amount to anything. They didn't have no city schools then like they has now. Mr. J. W. had a school that run in the daytime for the young'uns too little to go to the mill and at night for them that worked. Well I went to his school some before I commenced to work and at night fer a while too, but it didn't amount to so much.

Jonie's Family

"My wife, she come from Harrisburg. You know'd old J. D. Harris who used to be sheriff, didn't you? Well, he was her father. She looks stout enough to pull a freight car, but she ain't been so well here lately. My youngest girl, Katie, just finished high 5 school last year so I'm having her to stay here at home and help with the work. No sir, I don't want no Nigger girl around the house, I can't stand to have 'em about. There never was but one Nigger whose cooking I could eat, and she's dead now. She was all right. When she fixed something, all you had to do was set right down and eat it.

"We've got four children in all, two of 'em is boys and two is girls. My boy that's married and lives down near St. Stephens with his wife's folks, he works in the hosiery mill. My other boy works down here at the State Theatre. Christine, that's my oldest girl, is a

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cashier at McLellan's Store, but she's anxious to go to work in the mill. Well, you know, there's lots of 'em in stores now that feels that-a-way about it because they can git better pay in the mill and don't have to work sech long hours. If you was to ask me, I'd take the mill any time, and if my children wants to go into the mill, I'm glad fer 'em to. Hit's jest as good work as anything they can get to do and won't hurt their good name none. Course mill people are jest like anybody else, there's some that's no'count and shiftless and it's no wonder they're looked down on."

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Attitude to Employers

"I'll tell you hit's a pleasure to work for a company that treats you like the Cannons does. I've know'd all of 'em well. Many's the time back yonder that I hitched up Mr. J. W.'s buggy for him, drove him up town or down to the mill, and went to the Postoffice to get his mail. Charlie and Martin is the boys I know the best and they've turned out the best. Why I consider Martin Cannon jest as good a friend as I've got in this world.

"I've got a picture of Mr. J. W. in with my insurance policy — I'll show it to you if you'd like to see it. Yessir, he was a fine looking man and a good man too. See this insurance policy? He give every hand down at Cabarrus then one of these, and if I was to die tomorrow, my wife would git \$500. There ain't but four or five of us has these anymore because they took the policies away from all the hands that walked out during that big strike some years back.

"Yes, me and a few others kept right on going to the mill all the time they was having the strike. It took nerve too to walk in that gate with all the crowd standin' there hollerin' at you. They'd call us all kinds of names, but I didn't say a word back to 'em —that 7 was the best way to do. The mill wasn't running, but we got our pay fer going there.

"Plenty of 'em that walked out was sorry they had, some of 'em didn't want to go out in the first place but they was threatened. You couldn't begin to git me to join one of them unions.

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All they want is the dues they can git from you, and you don't never know what they do with the money because they won't give a report on it. I read in the paper not long ago where they wanted some union to show its books and it wouldn't do it.

“In this last strike every mill here and up at Kannapolis kept a-running all the time and no hands quit. I jest wisht you could've seen Kannapolis. Law it looked like a war, guns and soldiers all about. The mill had a airplane flying around to watch all the main highways and when it seen a band of cars (flying squader) starting out from some town, it would fly right low and drop a note down to let us know what was coming. At our mill we never was bothered by anybody. The funniest thing happened up at kannapolis when one of then squadrons went there. You know the mill owns the whole town. Well, the sheriff was on the lookout for these folks from out of town and every time they started 8 off the main street - hit's a State highway — the sheriff would say 'This is private property, you can't come on it.' So that squadron couldn't do a thing but go up and down main street till they got so wore out they jest give up and went back home.”

Politics

“What party do I belong to? Well I served two terms on the City Board of Aldermen so you know I'm not no Republican. I think what the government's been a-doing is all right. I tell you what's a fact, I believe we'd a had a Rebellion back when Roosevelt come in if the government hadn't done like it did. A man jest couldn't hardly keep going when Hoover was in; you can't live on no dollar a day like he said to do. You know, there's a sight of folks down at the mill has changed over to being Democrats in the last couple years.

“You take when they had that NRA, Mr. Cannon made us keep all the rules to the letter. If a man worked overtime one day, I had to allow him that much time off the next. Mr. Cannon is mighty particular about all sech rules.”

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Recreation

"I like to read the paper and listen to the radio right well, but I don't care a thing about the moving picture show. Why I reckon I ain't been to see one — let's see, hit's been five year or more now. The State Theater give me three annual passes for fixing some machines for them and I could a'gone to the show, without paying a cent, any time I took a notion to for three years, but I never did use them passes a single time; I wore 'em out jest carrying 'em around in my pocket. Nobody else couldn't use them because they had my name written across the front.

"When I git off from work I like to piddle around the house. There's most always something or other to be fixed or some kind of work to do about the yard. I wisht it was light now so you could see my back yard for hit's a lot bigger and prettier then the front. This summer I ran lights out there, fixed a pulpit and benches that I keep down under the back part of my house, and every Sunday evening hit was pretty we had preaching down in my backyard. It's mighty nice.

"I'm the sexton up at the church (St. Andrews Lutheran, in mill section). I git \$10 a month for 10 cleaning up, running the furnace, fixing the organ if it gits out of order, opening the church and ringing the bell whenever they're a-going to have a meeting, but I declare hit's more trouble to me than what I git out of it. If they could git anybody else who could run the furnace right, I don't reckon I'd keep the job, but them young boys they had been getting to fire it just nearly 'bout ruint it." Jonie's House

"Yes ma'm, this here house is mine; I saved up to build it and I planned it myself. Well now, I like these big rooms too — I was determined that when I built me a house I was going to have plenty of space about me, so when I planned this one, I made it like I wanted hit to be. If there's anything I despise it's to be scrouged into little bitty rooms. My wife and the girls see to keeping the rooms fixed up this a-way — that there music box (piano) is a real old timey one my sister bought somewhere.

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I've got an electric refrigerator that cost me \$200.00 — that's a lot of money and I hated to put it out at the time, but law, now I wouldn't begin to take what I paid fer it. I jest wouldn't be without it since I've got used to it. Something else I like mighty well is my automatic hot water heater. Hit keeps the water hot all the time, all you have to do is jest open any tap and you've got hot water right now, day or night.

“I would sure hate to go back to living like folks used to. Didn't nobody have things then the way we do now, living wasn't as good. There's a lot of people feel they can't git along without a automobile and some of 'em can't so well. I don't have one fer I ain't got no use for it; I walk down to the mill, to the church, or uptown when I'm obliged to go.”

“Well I've sure enjoyed talking to you and I hope you'll come beck agin when my wife's here fer I know she'd like to talk to you.

“I'll just walk across the street with you. I told Paul Ridenhour I would come over some time tonight and work on his stove fer him. Cold weather'll catch us soon.”